

2003 ANNUAL REPORT

COUNCIL ON AGING

The mission of the Council on Aging (COA) is to provide advocacy and support services to help Arlington elders live dignified and independent lives. 2003 was a difficult year for this agency. Reductions in local and state-level budgets resulted in some staff positions being eliminated, and other staff hours being reduced. This in turn drove the need to critically review our services and programs, and to decide what services would be essential to maintain in 2004.

The positions of Consumer Advocate and COA Receptionist were eliminated. The Town was able to provide only reduced funding for the COA Geriatric Nurse Specialist and Social Worker positions, and the bulk of the salaries for these positions now come from the already-reduced State Formula Grant. The COA also agreed to share its office space with the Board of Health, whose space at the Fox Community Center was lost. The COA Clerk/Secretary position saw a reduction in hours, and had the added responsibilities of billing and payroll for the Board of Health as well as for the Council on Aging.

Projections show a continuing growth of the elder cohort as a segment of the overall population. More are frail and homebound, and require more monitoring and complex services than in the past. Budgetary limitations will continue to affect the agency's ability to deliver services to Arlington's frail elderly.

The agency's ability to deliver services was reduced commensurate with the reduction in staff hours. Despite these limitations, judicious planning, along with the staff's dedication and determination, allowed agency accomplishments during the past year to remain impressive:

- ✓ A review was done of the agency's services and programs to validate each one's appropriateness.

- ✓ The open position of COA Transportation Coordinator/Supervisor of Volunteers was filled in March, although at less than a full-time level.
- ✓ Advocacy on elders' issues remains a top priority at the local, regional and state levels.
- ✓ Achieved a 30% increase in the number of COA volunteers in the past year.
- ✓ Increased participation in COA Health & Wellness programs under the direction of the Geriatric Nurse Specialist.
- ✓ In partnership with the Arlington Housing Authority and the Arlington Police Services, instituted the "RUOK"[®] Program for Arlington's elderly and disabled.
- ✓ Completed a successful one-year pilot-program/subsidy study for senior's dental needs. This is leading to the creation of a formalized senior dental subsidy program.
- ✓ Through the agency's lift-equipped vans and the subsidized taxi program, provided over 10,000 one-way rides for Arlington seniors.
- ✓ Held the agency's first Annual Senior Health Fair, open to the public, addressing the major medical issues and conditions affecting the elderly, and providing health promotion and screening for participants.
- ✓ Began ongoing series of workshops to enhance skill development among COA volunteers.
- ✓ Creation of an "Intergenerational Task Force", a joint program with the Arlington Seniors Association and Arlington High School.
- ✓ In conjunction with the Arlington Board of Health, delivered six hundred doses of vaccine to Arlington seniors at the agency's Annual Flu Clinic.
- ✓ Volunteers filled the Receptionist function for the Council on Aging.

There was also significant turnover on the nine-member COA Board as four new members were appointed in 2003. The new members will bring fresh ideas, talent and energy to the overall effort of doing the very best for Arlington's elders.

The Arlington Council on Aging wishes to extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who have made donations to our agency this past year, including The Lahey/Arlington Auxiliary, Minuteman Senior Services (*for a Title III grant in support of the COA/AYCC Grandparents' Support Group*), The Elizabeth and George L. Sanborn Foundation for the Treatment & Cure of Cancer, The Arlington Housing Authority, The Retired Mens' Club of Arlington, Park Avenue Congregational Church, Park Avenue Nursing & Rehabilitation Center, and the many individuals who have made monetary or durable medical equipment donations.

Such donations make possible, amongst other things, the continuance of our subsidy funds. For these funds no municipal, state or federal funding are used. Private donations alone provide much-needed services to those who are unable to afford them. Your kindness and generosity have made possible the availability of canes, walkers and wheelchairs for those who needed them, subsidy for costly but necessary medical transportation, and for Lifeline services.

We also wish to recognize those who have volunteered their time and efforts to bring some help to others: our Medical Escorts, Telephone Reassurance Volunteers, Friendly Visitors, Council on Aging Board of Directors, Tax Abatement Workers, our Office Volunteers, and those who have volunteered their skills and energies for special projects throughout the year. These folks donate time and talent all year long without being noticed by the general public; yet their contributions, over 5,000 hours annually, is known and appreciated by those who receive their gifts of time and caring.

Initiatives for the new year will be to:

- ✓ Prioritize the needs of Arlington's elders and their families, in the light of decreasing resources, and to direct service and program efforts where they are most needed.
- ✓ One lift-equipped van will need replacement in 2005; grant funding has been applied for.